



Office of Governor Mark Dayton
& Lt. Governor Tina Smith

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**Governor Dayton Announces Programs to Connect Minnesotans with
Disabilities to Opportunities in State Government**

*Connect 700 and Supported Worker programs seek to remove barriers to employment
and create opportunities for Minnesotans with disabilities*

State of Minnesota moving closer to 7 percent hiring goal for people with disabilities by August 2018

ST. PAUL, MN – Joined by community advocates and state hiring leaders, Governor Mark Dayton today announced the re-launch of Connect 700 and the Supported Worker programs, two state hiring initiatives aimed at removing barriers and creating opportunities for Minnesotans with disabilities. Through these programs, and broader efforts to ensure state government reflects the people it serves, This effort supports [Governor Dayton's 2014 executive order](#) directing state agencies to increase employment for people with disabilities to at least seven percent by August 2018.

“State government should reflect the people it serves, including those with disabilities,” said Governor Dayton. **“These programs will help expand opportunities to more Minnesotans who want to work to create a better, more inclusive Minnesota.”**

Connect 700 (formerly known as 700-Hour Program On-The-Job Demonstration and Appointment) will give Minnesotans with disabilities an opportunity to demonstrate their ability through an on-the job trial work experience, lasting up to 700 hours. This gives hiring managers the ability to better match people with the best opportunities for success, based on their skills and abilities.

“People with disabilities are an integral part of building an inclusive workforce. They bring a different perspective that fuels innovation, raises morale and drives organizational growth,” said Joan Willshire, Executive Director, State Council on Disability.

A second initiative, the Supported Worker program, offers people with disabilities integrated employment opportunities with up to 50 full time positions within various state agencies. These positions can be shared by up to three people with disabilities. Agencies who sponsor the positions will integrate them into existing teams, and will provide job coaches as needed.

“We are pleased that the Dayton-Smith Administration is revitalizing Connect 700 hour and Supported Worker programs that provides work opportunities for persons with disabilities,” said Colleen Wieck, Executive Director, Minnesota Governor’s Council on Developmental Disabilities.
“A 2005 research study of 600 Minnesota businesses showed that employees with disabilities were rated equal to or higher than employees without disabilities in similar positions in every performance attribute except for work speed. Employee attitude was the biggest driver of overall satisfaction.”

7 Percent Hiring Goal By August 2018

Recent surveys indicate that by 2020, the Twin Cities metro area alone will be short 120,000 workers. In order to compete and meet growing workforce needs, the State of Minnesota must ensure that all talent in our workforce is being recognized, fostered, and connected to opportunities in state government.

Currently, the percentage of employees with disabilities in state government is just **4 percent**. To connect more Minnesotans with disabilities to opportunities for state employment, Governor Dayton issued executive order 14-04 in 2014 directing state agencies to increase employment for people with disabilities to at least seven percent by August 2018..

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Alan Parnes, who led efforts to negotiate [Executive Order 14-14](#) as Chair of the Commission of Deaf, DeafBlind and Hard of Hearing Minnesotans Employment Task Force applauded the initiative.

“The Connect 700 program is a win-win for the disability community and the state of Minnesota. There are qualified talented workers who are deaf, deafblind and hard of hearing, and are eager to serve the state. Likewise, state hiring managers are looking for great employees. This program brings the two together and supports the Governor’s commitment to equity. We are thrilled to see this get off the ground,” said Parnes.

National Disabilities Employment Awareness Month

Governor Dayton’s announcement comes as part of National Disabilities Employment Awareness Month (NDEAM). Observed each October, NDEAM celebrates the contributions of workers with disabilities and highlights the value of a diverse workforce inclusive of their skills and talents. Reflecting the important role disability plays in workforce diversity, this year’s National Disability Employment Awareness Month theme is “#InclusionWorks.”

“Inclusion Works is something we know very well here in Minnesota,” said Darlene Zangara, Executive Director, State of Minnesota’s Olmstead Implementation Office. **“I encourage potential employees and state employers alike to use Connect 700 and the Supported Worker program to their full potential to create real opportunity while building a better Minnesota for all.”**

Creating a diverse and inclusive work environment for state employees has been a top priority of the Dayton-Smith Administration. Governor Dayton created the Olmstead Subcabinet under Executive Order in 2013 to implement Minnesota’s Olmstead Plan. Through the work of the Subcabinet and Olmstead Implementation Office, the State of Minnesota supports freedom of choice and opportunity to live, work, and participate in the most inclusive setting for individuals with disabilities.

To find out more about Connect 700 and the Supported Worker Programs visit mn.gov/careers. The state of Minnesota will hold its first ever Career Fair on October 29. All interested jobseekers to attend to learn more about what opportunities await them with the State of Minnesota. For more information on the State of Minnesota Career Fair visit: <https://mn.gov/mmb/careers/career-fair.jsp>.

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